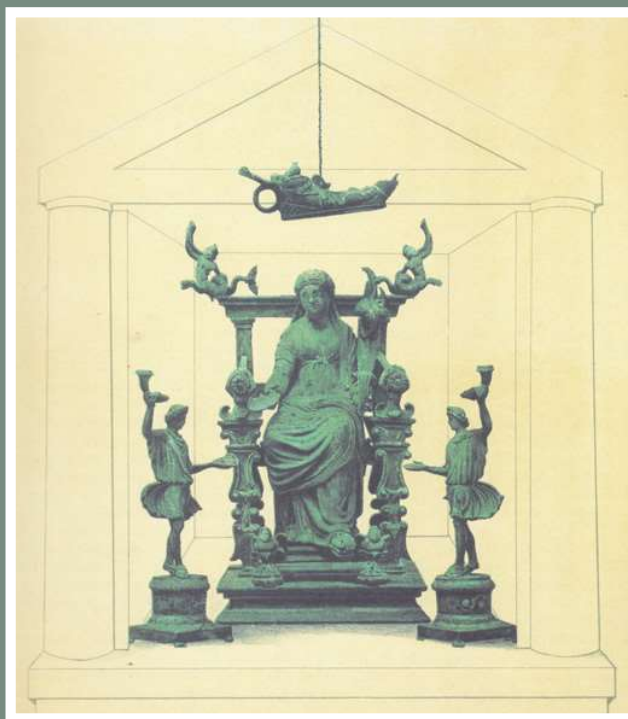


TANGIBLE RELIGION

MATERIALITY OF DOMESTIC CULT PRACTICES
FROM ANTIQUITY TO EARLY MODERN ERA

editors

RIA BERG, ANTONELLA CORALINI, ANU KAISA KOPONEN & REIMA VÄLIMÄKI



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Gods and Cult Objects in Roman Houses. Notes for a Methodological Research*

MADDALENA BASSANI

Introduction

How important ceremonials, rituals and their ‘material’ elements were in Roman society is widely known, and attested by a rich bibliography.¹ However, in the case of private ceremonies the complexity of data is such that it is sometimes hard to fully grasp the significance of some objects found in domestic worship spaces. In fact, whereas it is easy to understand the cult function of mobile artefacts such as *arulae*, incense burners, tripods or figurines and portraits, it is more difficult to trace the framework for that multiplicity of seemingly common use objects that can be found in private contexts, with a clearly ceremonial function.

Ancient man lived in a constant dialogue with the deities, with an approach that, for the Romans at least, could border on superstition: this aspect is well described by Polybius in a famous passage of his *Historiae*, where he explicitly speaks of *deisidaimonia*:² “To such an extraordinary height is [superstition] carried among them (*scilic.* the Romans), both in private and public business, that nothing could exceed it. [...] in my opinion their object is to use it as a check upon the common people. [...] seeing that every multitude is fickle, and full of lawless desires, unreasoning anger, and violent passion, the only resource is to keep them in check by mysterious terrors”.

Actually, this idea of superstition must be interpreted in a wider sense, as a need to arrange, pace and regulate through rituals, words and objects, too, every moment of the life of Roman men and women who, from birth to death, could resort to a plurality of divine figures to protect themselves from failures and calamities.

The number of these divinities must have been enormous, and the loss of Varro’s books on Roman cults and rituals created a great gap in our knowledge of this aspect.³ However, thanks to specific studies,⁴ it has been possible to retrace identities and spheres of action for many members of the Roman *pantheon*, and even to understand that each deity had been created to establish a cosmic order so as to regulate all aspects of life. Furthermore, to codify so many deities and as many powers, specific texts were written, which could also be consulted when needed: besides pontifical books, we have to remember *indigitamenta*, i.e. books

* I would like to dedicate this article to prof. Mario Torelli, recently deceased, with whom I discussed the paper and who gave me priceless advice: to him go my affectionate thoughts. I would also like to thank the staff of Institutum Romanum Finlandiae for the scientific management.

¹ SCHEID 1983; 2007a; about the ritual in the Roman world see in partic. SCHEID 2007b, 40–63, with previous bibliography; about the concept of polymorphism and orthopraxis see KING 2003.

² Polyb. 6.56.7–11, ed. by D. MUSTI, BUR 2002.

³ Varro, *Antiquitatum rerum divinarum libri*.

⁴ SCHILLING 1979; SCHEID 1983. For the cult of Lares in the Roman house see GIACOBELLO 2008; for local deities in the Roman *Pantheon* see VAN ANDRINGA 2011; see also the article of W. Van Andringa in this volume.

containing the names and explanations of the gods, along with the *formulae* to pray to them.⁵ There were of course the so-called major deities, coinciding with the Roman *pantheon*, but there were also many other so-called minor gods, each one with a name denoting their sphere of action. It is precisely these less ‘famous’ deities that are interesting to observe: not just because they were part of the Roman divine framework, but also because they could be invoked in the daily rituals of every family, to obtain protection from dangers, diseases, and failures.

The purpose of this contribution is thus firstly to examine some examples of mobile artefacts, dating from between the Augustan age and the early Empire, which at first glance appear as commonplace objects but, having been found inside private shrines, could represent the result of a ritual ceremony. We will attempt to interpret them thanks to literary evidence, not only in reference to the ‘main’ divinities, but mostly considering those ‘secondary’ deities who might have been relevant protagonists of Roman families’ daily routine. This is all the more true during the Augustan age, when the *princeps* began a great revival of archaic and sometimes forgotten rituals and festivities, useful in codifying and legitimizing his power.⁶

In the second and final part, we will examine some items of the better-known and much quoted class of private worship materials, the so-called *lararium* statuettes: despite being a set of artefacts which have been widely studied,⁷ I believe some hints derived from literary sources can offer further areas of future investigation.

Of course, this contribution only presents a suggestion for a method of analysis, that may be later rethought, but it could perhaps be useful in highlighting the need to consider as many elements as possible in the attempt to retrace the ritual sphere of *sacra privata* in the Roman age.

The Houses, their *Sacraria* and the Objects Found Inside

I believe it is useful to start from carefully-excavated archaeological contexts, in order to discuss private worship spaces, where there was a precise record of the set of finds; I have chosen four examples from the Vesuvian area, because it is a well-documented context, but it is not the only area with interesting points, as we will see.

The dwellings are the House of Ceii (I 16, 15), the House of the Wine-maker (IX 9, 6–7.10) in Pompeii, and, in Boscoreale, the villas in Fondo Zurlo and Fondo D’Acunzo.

The first house (I 16, 15) belonged to the ancient Samnite family of Ceii (second cent. BCE), as the epigraphs on the outside wall of the house testify (**Fig. 1**).⁸ One of the last members of the *gens*, a L. Ceius Secundus, running up for the post of aedile around 76 CE, had his house decorated with paintings connected to Isis, as can be seen in the winter *triclinium* and in garden *h*. Precisely this wide, partly uncovered space was overlooked by the small family *sacrarium*, room *g* (ca. 2.42 x 2.27 m), by means of a window flanked by two ionic semi-columns. Its interior also contains paintings of fourth style connected to Isis: on the walls we can in fact perceive cupids bearing Isis-related objects, such as a *situla*, a rose crown, a tambourine, and a drinking horn. A lot of everyday objects were collected inside, as can be seen in **Table 1**, like a small hatchet (14 cm) and a small pickaxe (23 cm), but also some valuable artefacts, such as fragments of a bell-shaped crystal goblet (12 cm in diameter, 13 cm tall), and wooden money boxes. These objects, as will be seen, may

⁵ PERFIGLI 2004.

⁶ SCHEID 2007b, 45.

⁷ ADAMO MUSCETTOLA 1984; KAUFMANN-HEINIMANN 1998. See in this volume the article by Ria BERG about hairpins.

⁸ See BASSANI 2008, 216–17, with previous bibliography.

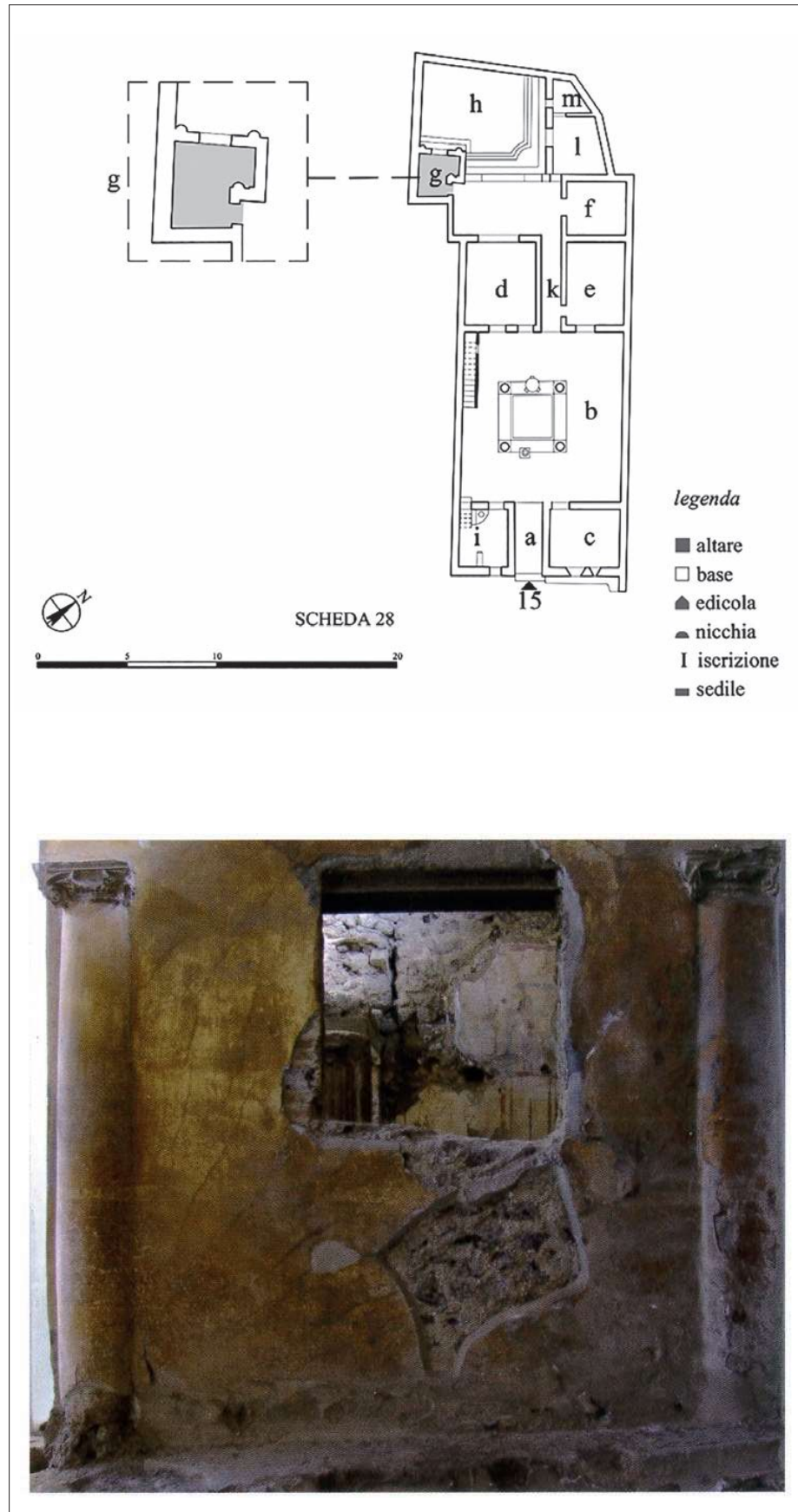


Fig. 1: Pompei, map of the Casa dei Ceii (I 6, 15) and photo of the external wall of *sacrum g* (After BASSANI 2008, 216–17 © Ministero della Cultura).

be indicators of a ritual connected to those above-mentioned minor deities, although a short time after the decoration the *sacrarium* was turned into storage space.

The second dwelling and its worship space feature some interesting elements: in the Wine-maker's house (IX 9, 6–7.10), so-called for the owner's probable business of producing and selling wine (first cent. CE),⁹ there was an outbuilding, *q* (3.11 x 3.45 m), at the back end of the large garden, *p*, which had initially served as a kitchen (Fig. 2). At some point, however, this building was transformed into a family shrine: a bench on two sides was added, as well as three arched *aediculae*, and an altar in front of the back-wall niche, painted with vegetal motifs. Numerous objects were found, possibly connected to worshipping activities (see Table 1): plates, glasses, vases, bottles, etc., but also a female statuette and some lanterns. In the dwelling, though, there were other cult spaces, such as an altar in front of the niche in passage *m*.

The other two contexts are two suburban *villae*, excavated in the 1800s and well-documented in *Notizie degli Scavi*, but later interred. The first is a rustic villa near Boscoreale, in Contrada Giuliana–Fondo Zurlo (Fig. 3), dated from the first cent. BCE on the basis of some coin finds, and only partly excavated.¹⁰ In fact, it must have developed southwards too, where a porticoed courtyard *D* existed, perhaps devoted to the residence's *pars urbana*, while the investigated northern part was mainly devoted to production activities. Right in front of one of the two surviving columns from the peristyle, at a slightly lower level, one could access shrine *A* (3 x 3.5 m), with a window on the outside: inside, there were various structural elements for ritual performances, besides numerous objects. Upon entering, on the right, there was a rectangular niche with a shelf, and on the opposite side there was a stonework parallelepiped pedestal (*e*); then, contiguous, a circular altar (*d*) and a long base (*c*), with traces of wood on the left side. The room, as reported at the time of discovery, was painted with squares divided by dark-red strips, and a golden candle-holder topped with a ball could be seen in the middle area, flanked by stylised swans; other paintings were also present on the altar and the pedestals: the former was decorated with festoons, the latter with reddish plaster. Like in the wine-maker's house, some saucers, a lock, balm glass bottles, and some lanterns were found here as well (see Table 1); moreover, an earthenware basin was recovered from the altar (52 cm in diameter), with traces of ash. In the villa there was a second worship space: in portico *E* a niche was found, fitted with a bronze lantern and painted with the Lares, the *Genius* and a piper at an altar.

The last dwelling was excavated still at Boscoreale, in Fondo D'Acunzo (Fig. 4) and it was generically dated from the first century CE.¹¹ Like in the previous house, here as well the worship space 12 (4.5 x 3.5 m) was located corresponding to the service area, being accessible from the kitchen 8, with a window on the outside; it too was fitted with two pedestals: one, (*z*), made up of a shelf supported by small wooden beams; the other, (*y*) made of stonework, situated on the back wall, was possibly an altar. The importance in the discovery of this room dedicated to the family worship lies in the quantity of objects found inside (see Table 1): seven bronze statuettes portraying Jupiter, Isis, the *Genius*, Neptune, Faun and Helios (but according to other interpretations the last three could represent another Jupiter and Castor and Pollux);¹² and most of all a myriad of other artefacts, mostly made of glass and clay (little bottles, saucers, oil bottles, etc.) but also precious materials: for example, a bronze *simpulum* and a *situla*, a carnelian gem and a golden ribbon, a porphyry ointment bottle and some objects in ivory (a spoon, a phallus, a pooch and two dice),

⁹ See BASSANI 2008, 230–31, with previous bibliography.

¹⁰ See BASSANI 2008, 211, with previous bibliography.

¹¹ See BASSANI 2008, 212–13, with previous bibliography.

¹² KAUFMANN-HEINIMAN 1998, 210.

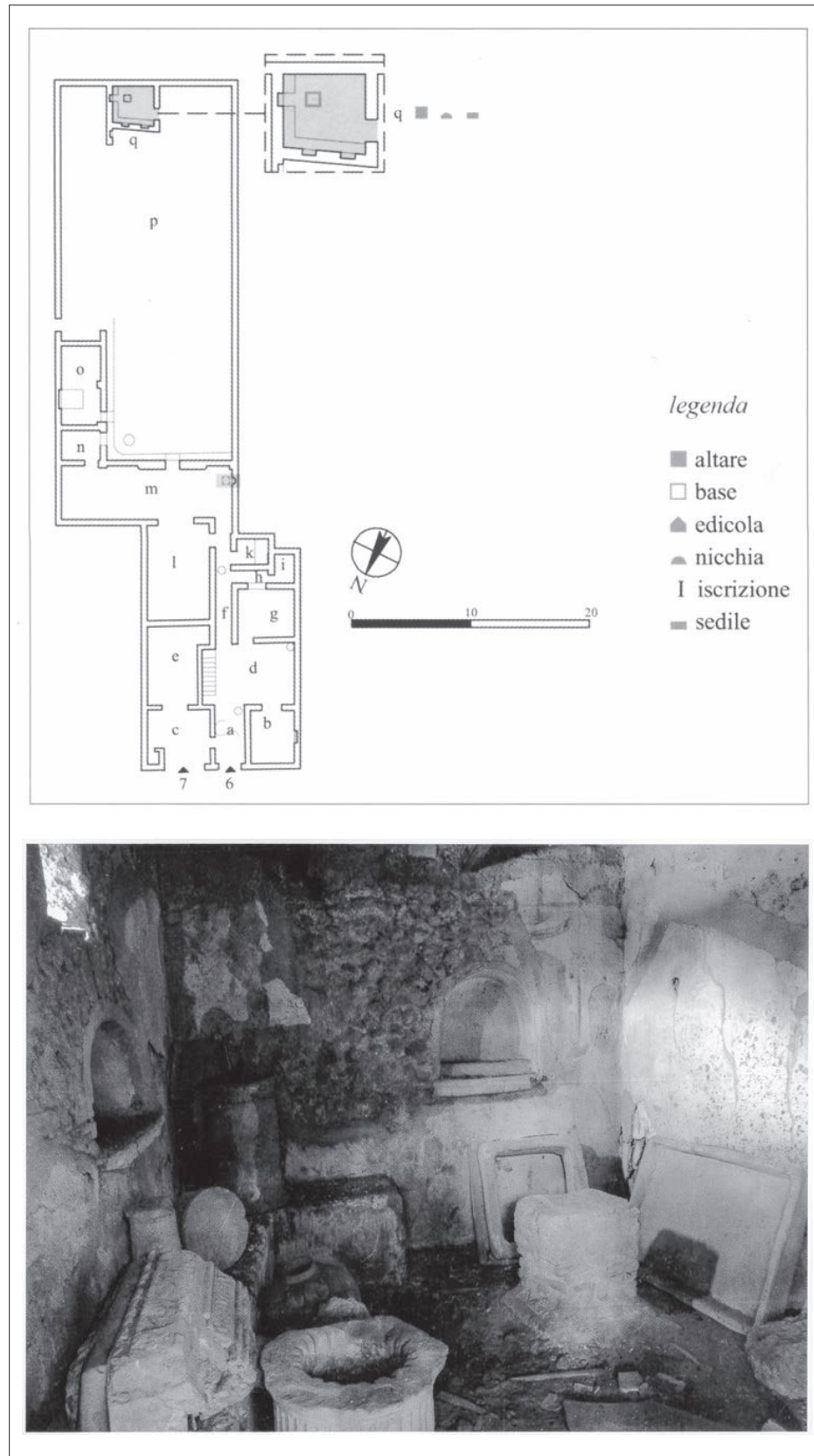


Fig. 2: Pompeii, map of the Casa del Vinaio (IX 9, 6–7.10) and photo of interior of *sacrum q* (After BASSANI 2008, 230–31 © Ministero della Cultura).

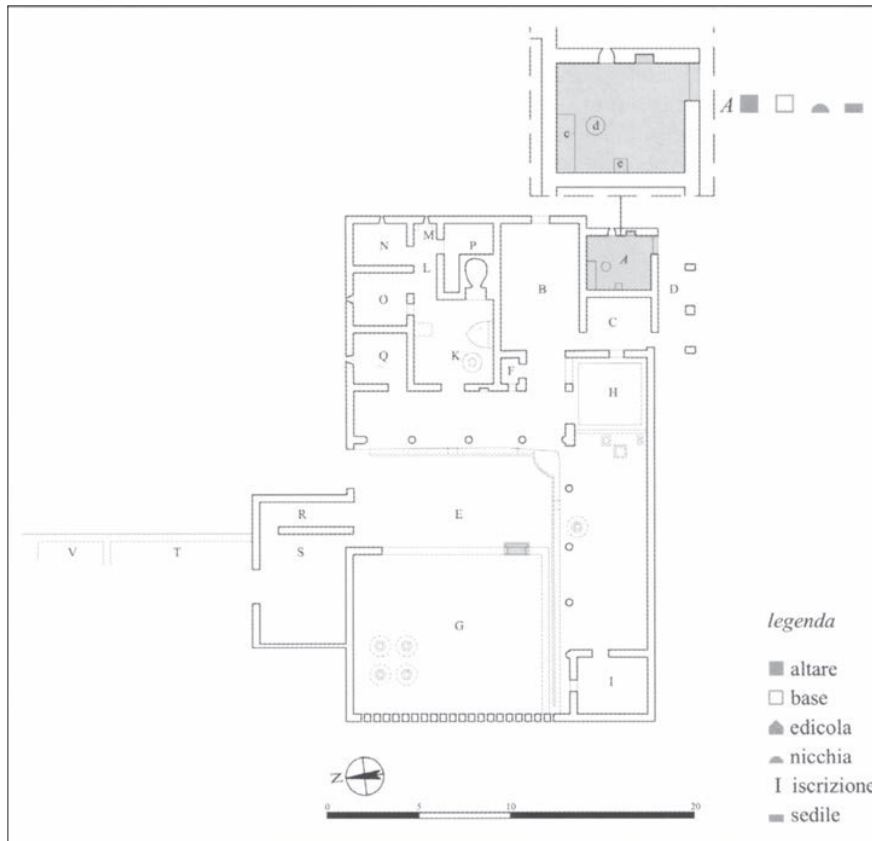


Fig. 3: Boscoreale, map of the Villa in Fondo Zurlo and of worship room *A* (After BASSANI 2008, 211 © Ministero della Cultura).

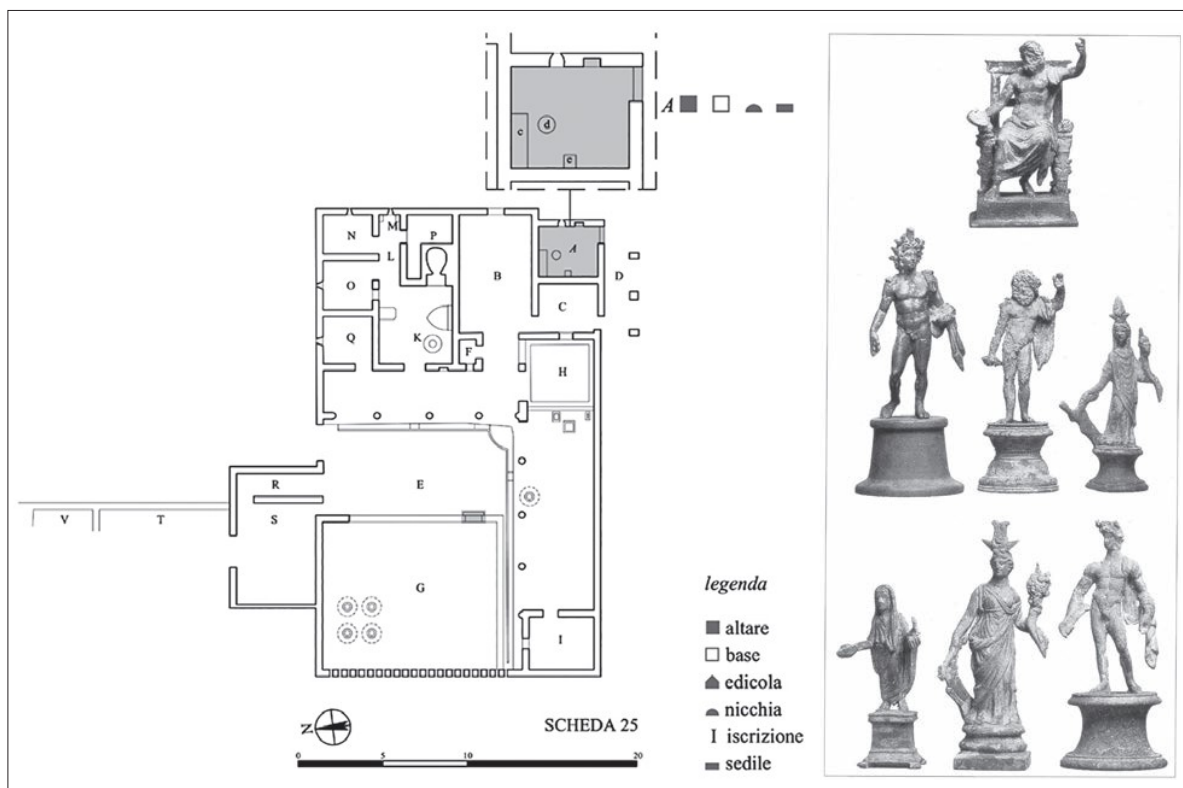


Fig. 4: Boscoreale, map of the Villa in Fondo D'Acunzo and photo of bronze statuettes found in *sacarium* 12 (After BASSANI 2008, 212–13 © Ministero della Cultura).

besides six silver coins. Eight pruning hooks and two hoes were also found, items clearly connected to the sphere of domestic and agricultural work, which, as we will see, may perhaps indicate specific rituals linked to certain moments of daily life.

Everyday Objects in Domestic *Sacraria*

Let us now consider the types of artefacts preserved in the above-mentioned worship places: altars, platforms, benches, niches, ritual tables, statuettes, paintings have been found, clearly denoting a sacred function; but many artefacts were also there, connected to the *instrumentum domesticum*. Relying on the excavation data, and without documenting pictures, three groups of materials are listed, pertaining to three fields of usage (see **Table 1**):¹³

1. objects connected to the preparation and consumption of food and drinks, made of bronze, glass or clay: pots and lids, an *authepsa* with its tray, bread-baskets, pans and pastry moulds, plates, cups, bowls, bottles, basins, little *amphorae*, goblets, an ivory teaspoon, a wine urn, a funnel and a *simpulum*;
2. items pertaining to working and farming activities, mostly made of iron: pruning hooks, hoes, axes, small pickaxes, rings, tweezers, scales, a candle holder, small round and pyramid-shaped lead weights, lanterns;
3. objects from the personal and household sphere, in various materials: a carnelian gem, some buckles, some mirrors, a small porphyry ointment bottle, clay oil bottles, safe boxes and locks, a gold band, several coins.

From such a list, we can infer that, excluding the ‘canonical’ ritual objects (*arulae*, statuettes, etc.), artefacts pertaining to daily life could also be left in Vesuvian shrines. Why? And how do we interpret these objects?

The first and simplest explanation is to deny the main function of those spaces as private shrines, and to suppose a multifunctional purpose: being storage and working spaces, objects used in the most diverse household activities could be left there. But it is also possible to give another explanation, that acknowledges the space as a private shrine and interprets such artefacts as a generic offering to the deities, connected to daily life. If this second hypothesis is highly preferable, the problem remains of explaining why and to which deities these objects were dedicated, and in which occasions they were left there.

These questions lead to a wider reference frame and to attempt other interpretations than the usual ones, also including literary evidence, and reading these objects, belonging to non-religious spheres of life, as possible indicators of ceremonies to invoke particular deities who protected specific moments or situations in human life.

Gods in the Town House

To start this dialogue between mobile artefacts and literary sources, I think it is important to begin from two late but eminent authors, Servius and Augustine. The latter, in particular, to prove the falsity of the pagan creed in favour of Christianity, lists in his *The City of God* some of those above-mentioned ‘minor’ deities,

¹³ A recently published volume underlines the necessity to re-examine the vast number of domestic crockery and utensils found in over 250 years of excavations in Pompeii, not just for a coherent and organic classification, but also to reconstruct food preparation, preservation and storing activities, as well as to hypothesize working activities according to the inhabitants’ social status: see KASTENMEIER 2007, 72–73 and note 40, with specific bibliography.

who helped protect the Romans' life.¹⁴ He thus introduces us to an imaginary ancient house which, as far as its peripheral walls, as Servius says,¹⁵ was under the *aegis* of Zeus *Herkeios*, protector of fenced spaces.

Starting from the hallway, Augustine reminds us that there were three deities in charge of this first part of the house: *Forculus* watched over doors (the name clearly comes from *fores*), *Limentinus* over thresholds (from *limes*) and *Cardea* on door hinges (from *cardines*);¹⁶ furthermore, as Servius clarifies, all the vestibule area was consecrated to Vesta, with a clear correspondence between the goddess's name and the entrance space.¹⁷ Precisely for the presence in this part of the house of a deity devoted to chastity, new brides could not touch the threshold, in view of their role of mothers. Servius also notes¹⁸ that, before entering their new home, *nubendae* used to adorn the doorposts with white woollen cloths as a good omen, and dress them with oils, under the eye of the goddess *Unxia*. In particular, the young wife about to step into a *domus religiosa* bringing some wool, would solemnly promise to be able to perform one of her main tasks, the *lanificium*.¹⁹

From these first pieces of information, some useful data already emerge, to attempt to explain the presence, inside private shrines, of apparently meaningless objects. We have seen how doors and thresholds were under particular deities, who presided over them by means of clear symbols: locks, hinges and latches, but keys too. In fact, among the artefacts in the above-mentioned Pompei shrines, there are some keys and locks, perhaps in some cases belonging to caskets, but in some other instances connected to house doors, like the exemplars found in Switzerland: here we can observe similar objects among the so-called *lararia* materials, sometimes quite large, such as in a villa in Courtaman or other private contexts.²⁰

Thresholds and door posts were also protected by little known but not negligible divine beings: Servius tells us that door posts were sprinkled with oils dear to *Unxia*, contained in oil bottles, so it seems reasonable to surmise that at least some of the oil bottles found in the above-mentioned shrines might have been dedicated in some particular family ceremonies: among these, we point out the small porphyry ointment bottle, from the votive offerings in the shrine at Villa di Fondo D'Acunzo.

Moreover, it is possible that the small vases and baskets could be used to preserve those woollen *vittae* connected to the young wives' activities of spinning and weaving, which could be well represented by loom weights, distaffs, etc., sometimes found in private worship sites, similarly to public ones.²¹

If we go back to Augustine's description of the gods peopling the Roman household and consider the young wife, a further piece of information emerges. We learn that on the wedding day, the young woman would beg various deities for help, such as *Domiduca* and *Iterduca* who presided over the nuptial procession,²² but also *Cinxia*, who watched over the untying of the bride's woollen belt in the bridal chamber: this was probably tied with clasps and rings, very similar to those found in some above-mentioned Pompei shrines. On the other hand, the groom could also count on a multitude of gods assisting him during the sex act: among these, *Subigus* (from *sub agere*), male deity who helped the *dominus* subjugate the woman,

¹⁴ Aug. *civ.* 6.1–6 (ed. by da L. ALICI, Milano 1990); this author extensively draws on Varro's book (*Antiquitates*), that is for the most part lost; about Augustine see DUMÉZIL 2001.

¹⁵ Serv. *Aen.* 2.469.

¹⁶ Aug. *civ.* 6.7.1 and before 4.8.

¹⁷ Serv. *Aen.* 2.469.

¹⁸ Serv. *Aen.* 4.458.

¹⁹ ANNIBOLETTI 2011, in partic. 72–73.

²⁰ KAUFMANN-HEINIMANN 1998, 280–21, GF75.

²¹ For example, in the curative shrine at Santa Veneranda near Pesaro (DI LUCA 2004); or in various votive deposits in central Italy (COMELLA 1981).

²² Aug. *civ.* 7.3.

along with *Prema* who favoured the couple's union thus ensuring their prosperity. Last but not least, the auspicious Priapus, whose symbolic phallus could feature as a propitiatory object among the offerings in worship rooms: an ivory one was found in the shrine of Villa in Fondo D'Acunzo, a concrete example of a prayer aimed at ensuring the family's well-being.

Gods in the Country House

Besides the town house there was a country house. Recent studies have pointed out that the divine beings called on to watch over the countryside, the valleys, the mountains or the hills, similarly represented, with their 'eloquent' names, a sort of classification of every type of land or activity performed there.²³ For instance, *Collatina* for the hilly grounds, *Vallonia* for those in the valley, *Rusina* for workable grounds, *Iugatinus* for the mountain chains. Moreover, as Servius remarks, "since names are given to the gods according to the jobs they do",²⁴ *Occator* was the god of harrowing (from *occatio*), *Promitor* for germination, *Sterculinus* for manuring (from *stercus*). The latter, according to Macrobius,²⁵ coincided with Saturn, because he was believed to be the inventor of the scythe, as well as of honey, fruit and fertilization.

Among the gods who helped man in his country residence was *Flora*, patron of blossoming and therefore of the following harvesting of fruits; the goddess *Robigo* was also venerated as a protector from rust. Her existence is precious for the hypothesis on the possible meaning of some objects found in private worship places. Ovid in his *Fasti* appeals to her in these terms: "Grip not the tender crops, but rather grip the hard iron. Forestall the destroyer. Better that thou shouldst gnaw at swords and baneful weapons. [...] But do not thou profane the corn, and ever may the husbandman be able to pay his vows to thee in thine absence".²⁶ So, the country man had to perform ceremonies in honour of the goddess who sheltered the harvest from rust, offering rusty tools over which she could feast sparing the crops: working tools like the pruning hooks and hoes found in the shrines of the two rural villas at Boscoreale, and which, though generally connected to farm work, could also be interpreted, within specific worship spaces, as offerings for precise ceremonies such as that in honour of *Robigo*.

If Ovid's passage offers new elements for interpretation and makes clear that 'negative' deities were also venerated, so as not to offend their sensibility, Augustine also gives new interesting clues to understand the possible significance of some offerings in private shrines. In particular, speaking of Liber, the bishop of Hippo explains that he had been entrusted with controlling both liquid seeds, i.e. fruit juices, wine first of all, and animal seed, i.e. seminal fluid.²⁷ If this aspect revealed the licentious nature of the festivals in his honour, it also stressed the Romans' attention to avert bad luck from cultivated fields, so that Liber could guarantee the utmost yield. But what were the ceremonies to perform? Many, surely, as we can infer from Cato's pages dedicated to the agricultural world and the rituals performed in the various working areas,²⁸ but the most interesting and relevant is, I believe, the one described, although briefly, by Columella.²⁹ Speaking about the preparations for

²³ See PERFIGLI 2004, 138–53.

²⁴ Serv. *geo.* 1.21.

²⁵ Macr. *Sat.* 1.7.25.

²⁶ Ov. *fast.* 4.910–32: *Nec teneras segetes, sed durum amplectere ferrum, / quodque potest alios perdere perde prior: [...] / sarcula nunc durusque bidens et vomer aduncus, / ruris opes, niteant; inquinet arma situs [...] / at tu ne viola Cererem, semperque colonus / absenti possit solvere vota sibi.*

²⁷ Aug. *civ.* 7.21.

²⁸ Cato *agr.*, *passim*.

²⁹ Colum. 12.18.4: *Cella quoque vinaria omni stercore liberanda et bonis odoribus suffficienda, ne quem redoleat foetorem acoremve. Tum sacrificia Libero Liberaeque et vasis presso <r>is quam sanctissime castitissimeque facienda, nec per vindemiam*

grape-harvesting, and explaining how cellars had to be cleaned, the writer clarifies that sacrifices must be made to Liber and Libera but also “to the wine-press vases with the highest reverence and purity”. Therefore, not only the deities who protected the grape harvest had to be revered, but also the containers, because destined to hold the precious liquid; thus perhaps, by analogy, some of those *ollae* and *amphorae* that could be destined to the first fruit of pressing.

Is there a trace of these vases in the shrines under examination? The answer is yes, and indeed it deserves a digression. In the shrine of the Villa di Fondo D’Acunzo, among the various objects, a ‘wine urn’ is mentioned which, without a picture, will have to be recovered from the stores of the Local Authority for Archaeological Heritage, to verify its shape and material.³⁰ From the point of view of lexical and typological classification,³¹ I believe it can be interpreted as a vase with decorated sides, perhaps similar to some fine ceramic items, widely present in the Mediterranean as far back as the early Imperial age. Based on Augustine’s and especially Columella’s testimony, its presence in the shrine of a rustic villa, which probably also profited from the sale of wine, must not be a surprise, nor can it be dismissed as a generic reference to Liber-Dionysus. That vase/urn can indeed be tangible proof of a specific ceremony in honour of both the god and the containers of the precious liquid.

It is, of course, a working hypothesis, which may or may not be confirmed in following studies, but if correct, it could also be extended to another above-mentioned shrine, in the wine-maker’s house in the *Regio IX* in Pompeii. Here room *q* was provided with all those cult indicators (an altar, a niche, paintings, a statuette and a ritual table) which allow for a certain classification. Inside it, various glass bottles, numerous small vases, basins, bowls and other containers for liquids were found:³² obvious signs of an economic and cult centrality of Liber. In fact, as W.F. Jashemsky remarked in an article from the 1960s dedicated to this very house, the whole dwelling seems to refer to this god: in the *domus* there were a lot of *amphorae*, mainly for wine, both in the garden and in the various rooms, so that it was supposed to be a *vinarius*’s house. It is not surprising, therefore, that in his own worship space, the owner had dedicated such a large number of liquid containers: Liber probably presided over his main source of income, wine trading, also attested by a *taberna* in the entrance hall.

No Entry for Some Deities

From the data so far presented, the written sources let us perceive the presence of some ‘minor’ deities in the house, to whom we can try to ascribe some common use objects found in the shrines. But there are also some ancient literary texts informing us that there were some gods in the Roman cult sphere who absolutely must not enter the house: and to prevent their access, particular rituals were necessary.

Augustine explains that the uncouth Silvanus, precisely as the god of *silvae*, had to remain far from inhabited areas, as civilized spaces hostile to him. In particular, if there was a woman who had just given birth, three deities had to be invoked, to protect the woman and the baby from the god’s violence. Augustine minutely describes the ritual:³³ “three men go round the house during the night, and first strike the threshold

ab torculari aut vinaria cella recedendum est, ut et omnia, qui mostum conficiunt, pure mundeque faciant ne<c> furi locus detur partem fructuum intercipiendi.

³⁰ According to *Notizie degli Scavi*, it measured 0.30 m in height, with handle terminating with a human finger upwards, and with a leaf downwards (*NSc* 1921, 440–41). See *EAA, Atlante delle forme ceramiche* II, 261, type I/84 and respective picture in fig. LXXXIII.

³¹ See, for example, the records offered by ANNECCHINO 1977; or the cases in BATS 1996, *passim*.

³² JASHEMSKI 1966-67.

³³ *Aug. civ. 6, 9: Tres homines noctu circuire limina domus et primo limen securi ferire, postea pilo, tertio deverrere scopis, ut his datis culturae signis deus Silvanus prohibeatur intrare [...] ab his autem tribus rebus tres nuncupatos deos, Intercidonam a securis intercisione, Pilumnus a pilo, Deverram ab scopis.*

with a hatchet, next with a pestle, and the third time sweep it with a brush, in order that these symbols of agriculture having been exhibited, the god Silvanus might be hindered from entering [...]. Now from these three things three gods have been named: *Intercidona*, from the cut made by the hatchet; *Pilumnus*, from the pestle; *Diverra*, from the besom”.

Augustine’s passage, though tinged with derisory tones in order to ridicule the Romans’ pagan beliefs, is however significant in highlighting the various private ceremonies around the god Silvanus, and the tools connected to them. In this case, too, specific objects are quoted as evoking some deities’ powers (*Intercidona*, *Pilumnus*, *Deverra*), called on to limit Silvanus’s sphere of action: the hatchet, the pestle and the besom in fact referred to the world of agriculture and therefore to an orderly world, separate from the unruly one of the *silvae*, belonging to Silvanus. That these rituals might be the reason for the axe and pick-axe found among the materials in the small *g* shrine in the house of Ceii, is a working hypothesis that must be duly verified; we can also point out that in Augusta Raurica some examples of small axes were discovered among the cult materials in a dwelling,³⁴ and other small hatchets come from a probably private context still in Switzerland, found together with other so-called *lararium* statuettes.³⁵

Therefore, it will be worth verifying if there is material proof in the Roman dwellings of this ‘external’ – so to speak – dimension of the god. In this respect, I think it is important to emphasize that the ‘domestic’ artefacts I know of, attributable to Silvanus, all come from external courtyards or gardens outside the house itself,³⁶ not from interior spaces. Maybe it is a coincidence, or maybe not.

This is a new research lead too, just like the need for a constant dialogue between literary and archaeological evidence emerges from the data presented: all the more so when the artefacts pertain to several life spheres, as is the case with the objects mentioned so far.

That these may actually refer to ‘minor’ deities is a plausible hypothesis, at least in some cases. But why, if this is the right track, were the symbols of these ‘secondary’ gods enough to evoke their presence? Why did not these deities have a face? Actually, I do not know of reliefs, *lararium* statuettes, nor paintings that may refer to these entities, only known for their *indigitamenta*. The explanation for this iconographic void is, in my opinion, very simple, almost banal: the deity became inherent in the object which represented his/her power. It was not necessary to have an image, which may not even have been codified: it was enough to leave a trace of the ritual, by offering the artefact which conveyed the presence of the god.

Some Examples of ‘Sacred Pictures’ for Private Cult and the Problem of the Imperial Cult

In this second and final part of my contribution, there is space to reflect on another category of cult artefacts, the so-called *lararium* statuettes. Not just on the best-known types made of bronze, but also on the less valuable ones made of clay or wood, which could evoke particular ritual occasions, and which could be bought at specific festive periods: in other words, I would like to enlarge on the precursors of the modern ‘sacred pictures’ (a term inclusive of various objects), which still nowadays can be bought on the stalls around churches and sacred places, or in specialist shops for religious items.³⁷

³⁴ KAUFMANN-HEINIMANN 1998, 106, S106; dating: 10–70 d.C.; *ibidem*, 117, dating: 80–120/180–300 d.C.

³⁵ KAUFMANN HEINIMANN 1998, 285–86, GF85.

³⁶ For example, a relief from the garden of the Casa degli Affreschi at Luni (BASSANI 2012b, 129); a statue from the courtyard of a villa in the *suburbium* of Rome (BASSANI 2012a, 16); a statue probably from the courtyard of another villa in the *suburbium* of Concordia Sagittaria (Portogruaro) (DI FILIPPO BALESTRAZZI 2011, 167). On Silvanus see NAGY 1994.

³⁷ In the long catholic tradition, as commonly known, there were a lot of patron saints for daily life activities: see for example in this volume the article by Claire RENKIN.

I will begin this time from the written sources, precisely from Apuleius.³⁸ The learned African writer, in a passage of his book written to defend himself from accusations of magic, explains that he had asked a craftsman from Oea to make an ebony statuette, which did not at all portray a skeleton, as his accusers claimed, but a small Mercury. Besides describing it in detail, the author says he was wont to carry it when travelling, along with those of other deities, to honour them, if need be.

Besides interest in the documentary datum itself, the text offers on the one hand a testimony of the habit of having cult objects made *ad hoc* for domestic ceremonies; on the other hand, it draws attention to a particular Roman festival, the *Saturnalia*. From 17th to 23rd December, there was a celebration in honour of Saturn, when it was customary to make *sigilla* or *sigillaria*, i. e. small wax or clay artefacts given as presents to ones' own relatives. But what did these objects depict and where were they sold?

Sigilla (or *sigillaria*) represented the most diverse objects, such as mythological figures or deities, but also deified ancestors.³⁹ A passage from Cicero's *in Verrem* is interesting in this respect; the orator tells a real story which took place in Sicily: during a banquet offered by Gnaeus Pompeius to Verres, the guest, attracted to the beauty of the *sigilla* chiselled on a serving dish, took the dish and removed its figurines, despite its being a "symbol of the cult of Penates and of the host's hospitality".⁴⁰ Therefore, even a simple dish decorated with particular images could take on a precise cult value, which apparently Verres did not take into consideration, being too attracted by the beauty of the work. This aspect is clarified by Cicero himself shortly before, when he remembers how Verres had taken away dishes, *paterae* and incense burners from all the houses in Sicily, reducing the matrons to tears, because they were used for sacrifices, had been inherited from their fathers and had always been in the house.⁴¹

The production of mobile objects offers similar exemplars, found both in Pompeii,⁴² and, for instance, in Hildesheim:⁴³ some of them reproduce, perhaps not by chance, small busts of figures that may very likely have been ancestors and that could be an object of devotion in particular family anniversaries.

But *sigilla*, in plain or precious material, could also portray specific subjects, for example deified emperors. A passage in a *scholium* (commentary) to Juvenal proves it, observing that during the *Saturnalia* in Rome, numerous *sigillaria* stalls could be found inside the *porticus* in the Baths of Trajan,⁴⁴ as well as in Agrippa's porticus, where the paintings of the Argonauts' feats were displayed: in the text the reference

³⁸ Apul. mag. 56.

³⁹ For a definition of the term see ROMIZZI 2005, 331–32.

⁴⁰ Cic. Verr. 2.4.22.48: *Qui (scil. Verres) cum in convivium venisset, si quicquam caelati aspexerat, manus abstinere, iudices, non poterat. Cn. Pompeius est, Philo qui fuit, Tyndaritanus. Is cenam isti dabat apud villam in Tyndaritano. Fecit quod Siculi non audebant; ille, civis Romanus quod erat, impunius id se facturum putavit; adposuit patellam in qua sigilla erant egregia. Iste continuo ut vidit, non dubitavit illud insigne penatium hospitaliumque deorum ex hospitali mensa tollere, sed tamen, quod ante de istius abstinentia dixeram, sigillis avulsis reliquum argentum sine ulla varitia reddidit.* See G. BALDO ed., Firenze 2004.

⁴¹ Cic. Verr. 2.4.21.47: *Qui (scil. Verres) simul atque in oppidum quoppiam venerat, immitterabantur illi continuo Cibyrici canes, qui investigabant et perscrutabantur omnia. Si quod erat grande vas et maius opus inventum, laeti adferebant; si minus eius modi quidpiam venari potuerant, illa quidem certe pro lepusculis capiebantur; patellae, paterae, turibula. Hic quos putatis fletus mulierum, quas lamentationes fieri solitas esse in hisce rebus? quae forsitan vobis parvae esse videantur, sed magnum et acerbum dolorem commovent, mulierculis praesertim, cum eripiuntur e manibus ea quibus ad res divinas uti consuerunt, quae a suis acceperunt, quae in familia semper fuerunt.*

⁴² BARATTE 1986.

⁴³ PIRZIO BIROLI STEFANELLI 1990, in partic. 62–77, with previous bibliography.

⁴⁴ Schol. Iuv. 6.153–54. (*Et armatis opstat*) *casa candida nautis: 'casam candidam' illud significat, quod Romae in porticu Traianarum t<h>ermarum tempore Saturnaliorum sigillaria sunt. tunc mercatores casas de linteis faciunt [quibus picturam obstruunt]. ideo autem dicit 'mercator Iason', quoniam antea in porticu Agrippi<a>narum sigillaria proponebantur: in qua porticu historia Argonautarum depicta est, et casae, cum fierent, picturae obstabant,* P. WESSNER (ed.), Lipsiae 1941. See now GRADEL 2002; BASSANI 2017, in partic. 236–39; BETTINI 2018, 141–45.

to the *sigillaria* of the 'Agrippinae' is ambiguous, but it is an interpretation that can be taken into account, considering figurines of the illustrious descendants of Augustus's right arm, Agrippa, dedicator of the same porticus.

In fact, reading the Juvenal's commentator and other literary sources it leads us to assume that there were precise places in the city where figurines could be bought, representing also emperors to venerate in domestic spaces, and, although cheap, bearing a strong connotation on the iconographic level: besides the precious and expensive objects like bronze statuettes of deities, there was a considerable mass of cult objects affordable for everyone, representing the Augusti. Such objects made of humble materials were clearly inspired to the Emperors' iconographic prototypes elaborated at court, to be reproduced in portraits, or medium and large but also small statues, as attested by the bronze statuettes found in the Forum of Augusta Emerita, which seem to represent precisely Augustus, Livia and Tiberius.⁴⁵

Thus, the issue of imperial cult also appears in the private religious sphere: a topic that has been widely debated and studied, and generally found to be a phenomenon connected to a sort of loyalty/political opportunity mostly practised in the public and official sphere from the Augustan age.⁴⁶ Indeed, if from 7 BCE the cult of *Genius Augusti* was decreed even among the Lares Compitales, evidence of imperial cult in households is very rare.⁴⁷ However, some scholars have observed characteristic traits in exemplars of statuettes found in Pompeii houses: the case of the statue of so-called Mercury-Aesculapius from the House of Red Walls (VIII 5, 27) is emblematic; his face could represent Augustus, with an oval tending to a triangular shape and a small chin.⁴⁸ Suetonius in fact states that he himself had found a bronze effigy of Augustus in a street market, portrayed in his youthful looks and with the nickname Turinus,⁴⁹ which he had then given to Hadrian so that he could venerate it among his Lares.

But beyond Augustus, some scholars proposed to identify an imperial iconography in a statuette of a female deity from the House of the Mirror, still in Pompeii (IX 7, 20): it was found in a niche in the atrium, flanked by two Lares effigies, and though it has been mostly interpreted as an image of Fortune, according to some studies it might be Livia,⁵⁰ or a personification of Concordia Augusta.⁵¹ However, as stressed before, the face of this figurine is very different from that of Augustus's wife, who usually had a straighter and smaller nose; nor are there other known examples in Pompeii of an effigy of Concordia among the *lararium* statuettes. It could not represent one of the two Agrippinas from the Julio-Claudian dynasty: although they could even be two important personalities for the imperial cult.⁵²

The problem, however, can be proposed. Surely, it is worth noticing that the owner of the House of the Mirror was an Augustal, a D. Caprasius Felix, who must have been interested in having in his house a statuette of exquisite workmanship, referring probably to an *Augusta*. With such an assumption, it seems acceptable to propose that in some cases the features of emperors and *Augustae* may be traced in the faces of statuettes: it is a new field of study which deserves some attention, I believe, as much as the cases of rulers' statues with divine features are studied.

⁴⁵ NOGALES BASARRATE 2007, 510–11.

⁴⁶ See FISHWICH 1987–1992; SMALL 1996.

⁴⁷ KRZYSZOWSKA 2002, in partic. 175–82; on Lares Compitales see VAN ANDRINGA 2009.

⁴⁸ ADAMO MUSCETTOLA 1984, 18–20.

⁴⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 2.6.

⁵⁰ ADAMO MUSCETTOLA 1984, 20–23.

⁵¹ KRZYSZOWSKA 2002, 178–80.

⁵² For an analysis of imperial hairstyles see BUCCINO 2013, with previous bibliography.

In this respect we can recall some sculptures attested in dwellings of Roman Italy, for example: in Luni, in the House of Frescoes, a bust of Tiberius Gemellus was recovered, who was venerated together with other deities in the sacred space of that house's garden.⁵³ In Abruzzo, in the villa in Fonte del Sedime (AQ), a fragment of a basalt head was found, which for the type of headdress – based on the model statue of Augustus of Prima Porta – has been interpreted as a *princeps* bust and therefore as a subject of *sacra privata*.⁵⁴ Whereas the fragments of a statue of Augustus found in a small space in the Coiedii's house in Suasa remain of uncertain interpretation;⁵⁵ the portrait head of Marcellus recovered in a Roman villa near Taranto proves a clear worshipping function.⁵⁶

Surely, compared to the clay *sigilla* mentioned at the beginning of this section, the statues here presented are medium-high level products, made to venerate members of the imperial house: anyway, through them it will be possible to also examine the issue of imperial cult at a domestic level,⁵⁷ so far only dealt with from a public point of view.⁵⁸

However, both this aspect and the one discussed above relating to daily-use artefacts dedicated in domestic shrines are, hopefully, entirely new study fields which will perhaps enable us to better understand the various issues connected to *sacra privata*. It is valuable to have here proposed different methodological fields for this study, which can lead to original research areas.

<i>House, Cultural Room or Cultural Building</i>	<i>Sculptural Objets</i>	<i>Various Objects</i>
Casa dei Ceii, Room g		<i>Bronzo</i> : authepsa su vassoio, scudetto e anello di una cassa di legno, bassetta a piede umano. <i>Cristallo</i> : calice. <i>Ferro</i> : serratura, scure, piccone. <i>Oss</i> : targhetta, <i>Legno</i> : 2 casse, cassetino-portamonete (NSc 1913, 223–24).
Casa del Vinaio, Building g	Little Female Clay Statuette on <i>kline</i>	<i>Bronzo</i> : sesterzio, candelabro, specchio. <i>Vetro</i> : 8 vasetti, 3 bacili, 2 piatti, 2 bicchieri, tazzina, 3 boccette. <i>Terracotta</i> : 2 vasetti, lucerna con altre 3 lucernette sovrapposte, 2 lucerne, vasetto, 7 piattini, 4 ciotole, 3 tazze, 3 pignattini, coppa, anforetta (NSc 1888, 574).
Villa Fondo Zurlo, Room A		<i>Bronzo</i> : serratura. <i>Vetro</i> : 5 balsamari. <i>Terracotta</i> : 5 piattini, coperchio, 2 lucerne (NSc 1897, 393–94).
Villa Fondo d'Acunzo, Room 12	7 Bronze Statuettes: Giove, Iside-Fortuna, <i>Genius</i> , Dioscuri (?)	<i>Bronzo</i> : bilancia, casseruola, 4 fibbie, 4 anelli, oleari, simpulum e situla, forma di pasticceria, pignattino e pignatta, vasettino, imbuto, specchio, urna vinaria, torta, specillo, pinzetta, serratura, 35 monete imperiali. <i>Argento</i> : 6 denarii. <i>Oro</i> : nastrino di filigrana; <i>Corniola</i> : gemma con quadriga. <i>Avorio</i> : cucchiaino, fallo, cagnolino, 2 dadi. <i>Porfido</i> : unguentario. <i>Piombo</i> : 5 pesi da telaio. <i>Ferro</i> : 8 roncole e 2 zappe. <i>Vetro</i> : 3 anforette, 7 bottiglie, 3 tazze, pareretta, cratere. <i>Terracotta</i> : 8 oleari, 5 pignattini, 2 urcei, 3 piatti, 3 scodelle aretine, tazza, 2 lucerne (NSc 1921, 440–41).

Table 1. Mobile objects found inside the cult spaces of the four houses examined (see the Italian words reported in *Notizie degli Scavi*).

⁵³ BASSANI 2012b, 128–29, with previous bibliography.

⁵⁴ CAMPANELLI 1993, 66–67.

⁵⁵ CAMPAGNOLI 2010, 319–34.

⁵⁶ MASTROCINQUE 2010, 166, with previous bibliography.

⁵⁷ I have been examining this topic within a research project about *sacra privata* in central Italy: BASSANI 2017; the topic was partially studied some years ago by J.M Santero (SANTERO 1983).

⁵⁸ See the articles edited by NOGALES – GONZÁLEZ 2007.

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